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Babylon

by Arrabal

ted from the French
nard Howard

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Fernando ARRABAL

BAAL BABYLON

a novel

translated from the French

by Richard Howard

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BAAL
BABYLON

A man was burying my feet in the sand. It was on the beach at Melilla. I remember his hands near my legs and the sand on the beach. It was sunny that day, I remember.

You keep a package of photographs in an envelope I used to look at sometimes. Some have turned brown. Probably because of the old way they were developed. Many of them have an illegible signature, but now I know whose it is. Often there's a date underneath, sometimes an explanatory phrase. We're in almost all of them, you and I: you're carrying me in your arms, you're holding me by the hand, you're helping me eat. Other pictures have a half cut off, or else they are missing a piece.

You told me I was walking behind you, holding onto your skirt. You told me one day I peed in the middle of the room and dragged you to the place and went: "Wah, wah." You

told me things like that all the time. I don't remember any of them. I remember other things: an Arab who brought eggs one morning and dipped them one by one into a bucket of water; a night when I climbed up a ladder with you into a boat; and I remember the man's hands and my feet buried in the sand.

I have the "Doctor Plumb" pipe in my mouth. I'm smoking cheap tobacco, they call it gray tobacco here. It was a little dry yesterday so I put pieces of orange peel in my tobacco pouch. Today when I put my fingers in it I can feel the tobacco is fresh. The pipe is pretty well seasoned and it has an odor even when it's out. I like the odor. I don't inhale the smoke; you know I never learned how. I've tried with cigarettes sometimes, but I couldn't. The pipe is papa's "Doctor Plumb." Maybe he tried to commit suicide in prison with the pipe on his table.

At Villa-Ramiro, grandma used to say I should put it on the left side. Since I put it on the right, grandma said I was a girl.

She told me to go from the dining room to

my bedroom down the hall—it was long and dark. I crouched behind the door. Through the crack, a ray of light from the dining room fell on me. When she discovered I hadn't gone to bed yet, hadn't gone down the hall, she called me a chicken.

Grandma told me her father always made her go down the hall at night so she would get used to not being afraid. He gave her a twist of straw to light the way. She said the shadows came and went across the walls. And when she was little, she had to kneel at his feet to take off his boots. He was in the *Guardia Civil*.

Grandma used to tell people who came to the house I was really a girl; then I locked myself in the bathroom. She also told them I put it on the right when I should have put it on the left, the way all men do; then I would stick my hand under the tablecloth and put it on the left. Then it went over to the right all by itself.

In Madrid, you made me go down the hall too—it was long and dark—to my bedroom at night. In Madrid, I waited at the door; behind me everything was dark. And then I crouched down and waited.

Now it stays over on the left all by itself, the way all men's do.

The last time I went to see you you were alone in the house. You had lowered the blinds in the room. There was almost no light. I groped my way to a chair and sat down. You said: "Wait, I'm going to close the windows, I don't want the neighbors to hear us."

After a while I could see you were sitting in the armchair. A wide board across the arms made a table for you. You were leaning back in the chair but the board was near your chest.

You talked to me for an hour, remember? The windows were closed so the neighbors didn't hear what you told me. The blinds were lowered so the neighbors didn't see that you were crying and that every once in a while you tried to kiss me and take me in your arms.

Later I could see what you had put on the board you were using as a table. You were playing solitaire. Grandma said that when her father was an old man he used to play solitaire too and that he cheated so he could win.

While you were talking I could see you had gray hair. I remember thinking that you didn't dye it any more. Before, when you dyed it in the sink, I helped you by bringing what you needed when you asked for it.

When I started to leave you didn't want to turn on the hall light so as not to use too much electricity. And I kissed you in the dark, near the door. And you kissed me in the dark, and you hugged me.

You were combing your hair in front of your mirror and your hair—it was long and curly —kept falling out onto your bathrobe. In the morning you went barefoot, all over the house. In Madrid, the men stared at you and I remember I had to interfere several times.

The day when you were holding me by the hand and that man began walking beside you, I remember pushing him away and insulting him. In Madrid, when you took us to play in the country and you sat down on the ground near a pine tree, I covered your legs with my sweater to keep the men from staring at you.

You walked around the house barefoot. When you came home tired from the office you unhooked your girdle in front of us and then I went out of the room.

At night when you smeared your face with grease I went to bed without kissing you. In the

morning I heard you walking around the house barefoot to get your things ready. Then you came into my room and I could kiss you because your face wasn't greasy any more.

When the village boys went into the ring, some fell down at the gate. Then the bulls ran in. You weren't at Villa-Ramiro.

From the top of the walls we watched the men on horseback driving across the fields toward the village. Then we ran to the ring and took seats. Grandma and Aunt Clara ran too so as not to miss the entrance of the bulls. But you weren't at Villa-Ramiro then so you didn't see anything.

When the bulls ran into the ring, the men jumped over the *barrera* and hid behind the *burladeros*. The seven bulls ran in all directions and no one could go out and rescue the two boys who were hurt. From the top of the stands we heard the *pasodoble* and we watched the bulls running. But since you were in the city, I had to tell you everything afterward.

It was very hot so grandpa took off his coat and grandma and Aunt Clara rolled up their

sleeves. When the bulls passed close to us the sun gleamed on their shiny coats. They snorted and ran while the crowd applauded and shouted.

Then they sent out the oxen and the seven bulls followed them into the *toril* and then they could take out the two boys who were hurt. When you came back to Villa-Ramiro I told you everything while with my finger I smoothed your eyebrows—they were black—and your nose.

It was near the end that I would get a hard on.

Aunt Clara, who knew the mysteries of the Rosary by heart, led the prayers every evening. Aunt Clara began her Hail Marys only a few seconds after our Holy Marys were over. But that wasn't when I got the hard on.

While we were saying our prayers we were supposed to be sorting peas and beans. Grandpa was making cigarettes with pieces of paper and cotton filters. Grandpa took the cotton from the roll you and Aunt Clara used.

Aunt Clara said the Hail Marys of the first, third, and fifth mysteries. Then we recited the

Holy Marys of these mysteries. Aunt Clara said the Holy Marys of the second and fourth mysteries. Then we recited the Hail Marys of these mysteries. But that wasn't when I got a hard on and became wet.

Grandpa was making cigarettes with a long metal tube. For a filter he used cotton from the roll you spotted with blood and that I went to look at in the wooden box in the kitchen.

Aunt Clara, who knew the litanies by heart, led them. But that wasn't when I got a hard on and had to hide it under the edge of the tablecloth. And it wasn't when she recited a prayer in Latin right afterward.

When Aunt Clara was through with this prayer, grandpa left the table and went out into the hall to smoke a cigarette, walking up and down.

It was at the end that I got a hard on. When Aunt Clara was reciting Our Fathers for particular intentions and when grandma was whispering new ones to her. I got a hard on and the end became wet while I was giving the responses to Aunt Clara's and grandma's Our Fathers, there were more every night.

And I asked you if you would die too.

And you told me: "Yes."

And I asked you: "What will I do?"

And you told me I'd be grown up then.

And I asked you: "What difference does that make?"

And you told me it did.

And I told you: "All right."

And you told me we would all have to die.

And I asked you if it was for good.

And you told me: "Yes."

And I asked you: "Then what about Heaven?"

And you told me that that came later.

Yes.

And I told you I would bring you flowers.

And you asked me: "When?"

And I told you: "When you die."

And you said: "Oh!"

And I told you I would bring you flowers and then I told you: "Poppies."

And you told me it was better not to think about that.

And I asked you: "Why?"

And you told me: "Because . . ."

And I said: "All right." And then I asked you if we'd see each other in Heaven afterward.

And you said: "Yes."

And I said: "That's good."

Yes.

And I asked you who made it up.

And you said: "What?"

And I said: "About death."

And you told me: "Nobody."

And I asked you: "And the rest?"

And you said: "The rest of what?"

And I said: "About Heaven."

And you told me: "Nobody."

And I said: "Well." And then I said: "Well." And then I told you: "Then when you die I'll make a drum out your belly."

And you told me: "You musn't say that."

And I asked you: "Is it a sin?"

And you told me: "No."

The walls of Villa-Ramiro were high. Grandma told us not to play on the battlements

or go down to the moat. I went down to the moat with my friends where I saw the battlements silhouetted against the sky. They all wanted me to climb the drawbridge wall and I squirmed up by holding onto projecting rocks.

When you came from the city, we went to meet you at the station. Grandpa drove us in one of his friend's cars and I looked through the window at the trees moving backward as we drove along. You brought us bread and picture magazines from the city.

You looked at the drawings I made and when you were at home you helped me make the map I had to take to school every morning. You remember, you told me about it often. I know you keep my drawings in the wardrobe drawer with the flower collection I made in the fifth grade.

Haven't I always sacrificed myself for you, always? If I made mistakes sometimes, it wasn't because I wanted to, but. . . ."

You paused. You sighed.

"I'm only a poor uneducated woman who's done all she could for you. I've always been the

slave of your least whim. Do you know any other mother who's done as much?"

The first row included the king of diamonds, the queen of clubs, the jack of spades, the seven of diamonds, the six of hearts, and the five of diamonds.

"Tell me one other."

The window was closed so the neighbors didn't hear what you were telling me. The green blinds were lowered by cords down the middle.

"When did you ever see me enjoy myself like other women, or buy myself something I like, or go to the movies or the theater? You know how much I'd like to go, but have you ever seen me spend a penny on such things, even once?"

The second row included the jack of hearts, the seven of spades, the six of clubs, the five of hearts, and the four of spades.

"I've never spent a thing on myself. Never. Yet how many women my age enjoy themselves, run around, spend their money on clothes, jewelry, perfume! You don't know anything about life, you don't know how people live. But I've never done any such thing, not because I wouldn't have enjoyed it, but because I'd rather sacrifice everything for you. Night and day I've done nothing but try and find out what you

liked so I could give it to you. And if I make mistakes sometimes, I'm telling you you have to blame it on my lack of education and intelligence. I'm only a poor woman who's been left without a husband and without anyone to advise her in a very difficult situation, a situation I could only get out of by hard work."

The blinds were lowered so the neighbors didn't see you while you were talking to me.

I went to the sisters' school with Elisa. Every morning I left for school with the map of Spain drawn on my slate. When you were in Villa-Ramiro you helped me make it. I began with the Atlantic, first drawing a little of the French coast, and I ended with the Mediterranean, drawing another bit of the French coast. I marked the borders with France, Andorra, and Portugal with little crosses. When you came to Villa-Ramiro you sat down next to me and gave me advice. Your hands were white and smooth.

The day of your birthday I made you a drawing on a piece of cardboard. You keep them in the wardrobe drawer. Grandma helped me.

Under the drawing I wrote: "Long live Christ the King!" Grandma's hands were wrinkled and the veins stood out.

The day of your birthday you came to Villa-Ramiro and we had ice cream for dessert. You took strawberry, Elisa took chocolate, Aunt Clara and grandpa took pistachio, and grandma took vanilla. I took strawberry ice cream too.

The day of your birthday we went for a walk along the river and when my classmates passed us they knew I was with you.

We walked along the bank and I asked you the names of the trees and you told me. From there you could see the walls, the bridge, and the castle. I asked you who made the bridge and you told me it was the Romans. And I asked you who built the castle and you told me it was King Henry of Trastamara. And I asked you when they knocked off the missing battlement and you told me that had happened during the siege. The sun was bright and you were wearing a hat: sometimes the shadow fell over your eyes, sometimes over your lips, and sometimes over your chest.

When we came back my classmates saw me with you and then I took your hand.

You asked me: "What are you doing?" And I answered: "I'm praying."

The beds were made of wood and in summer, because there were bedbugs, once a week we burned the metal springs with cotton dipped in kerosene and we stopped up the holes they made in the wall with plaster.

You came over to my bed. Then you went away to lie down. I went on reciting Our Fathers as fast as I could.

My room at Villa-Ramiro connected with Elisa's. Sometimes during the siesta we had pillow fights. At night Elisa and I didn't have pillow fights: I recited Our Fathers until I fell asleep.

My bed was high, the quilt was dark and at night the walls were black. I recited Our Fathers, trying to hold my breath until I was covered with cold sweat.

In summer, because there were bedbugs, once a week we tried to find their nests with a needle.

I fell asleep reciting Our Fathers as fast as I could and without moving. Shadows appeared on the black walls: each time I opened my eyes I saw them, each time I closed my eyes I knew they were there.

The bedbugs we caught on Saturdays we threw into a chamber pot half full of water.

Later I recited the Our Fathers more slowly. Since I wasn't cheating that way and I was really thinking about what I was saying I wouldn't die during the night.

A few years later after they invented insecticides I stopped putting myself to sleep by reciting Our Fathers so as not to die during the night.

There were no more photographs of him in the cardboard box. The box was at the bottom of the trunk in the little closet. There was only the "Doctor Plumb" pipe and a package of letters and papers. You were at the office so you didn't see me go into the closet or open the trunk with the key from the kitchen cupboard.

The "Doctor Plumb" pipe is long, with a fairly large bowl. I think he must have been tall to have a pipe as long as that. In the trunk near the box there was also an empty briefcase.

I remember, the man was burying my feet in the sand. I remember his hands near my legs and the sun on the beach at Melilla.

When I opened the trunk, it smelled of mothballs. The top was covered with blankets. At the bottom there was a cardboard box and inside it a package of letters and papers, and the "Doctor Plumb" pipe.

You were at the office so I took the pipe and I hid it in my things. I think he might have been short so that to make up for it he bought himself a pipe as long as the "Doctor Plumb" I have in my mouth now.

The doctor said that I should take Remifon, P.A.S., and streptomycin. When the nurse comes in I turn over and I lower my pajama bottoms. While she gives me the shot I pinch myself as hard as I can. Then the nurse goes away, and I write you.

The doctor gave me fifteen days' vacation and I went to see you one afternoon in Madrid. You were in the dining room with the windows closed and the blinds lowered. Now I am writing you from my room.

The doctor lets me smoke so I use the "Doctor Plumb" pipe. I watch the rain from my window. I also hear the water dripping from the

gutter. I am waiting until the clock strikes to go down to dinner, and I am writing you.

The doctor said I should rest; and I am resting. The doctor said I could come down to the dining room for meals now; and I do come down. The doctor said I should stay here another year; and I will stay. The doctor lets me write during the afternoon rest cure; and I am writing you now.

In Madrid you went to the office and Aunt Clara came in. She pulled off my sheets and I put on my pants.

We kneeled and recited the morning prayers. Aunt Clara led the prayers and she put my palms together to keep them straight. While she was praying Aunt Clara closed her eyes and now and then looked up at the ceiling. I felt her elbow next to my elbow.

Aunt Clara washed me, she used a fiber mitt for scrubbing. I was cold and I told her: "But I'm fourteen years old!"

She washed my face and neck and she hurt me. Aunt Clara was wearing a nightgown and when she leaned over I looked in the mirror and

saw the cross that hung around her neck down between her breasts.

When we were living in Madrid you kissed me before you went to the office because your face wasn't sticky. Then Aunt Clara came into my room and made me get out of bed by pulling off the sheets and I put on my pants.

She washed my hands, my face, my neck, and my ears. While she scrubbed me with the fiber mitt, I felt the weight of her body against my back. Sometimes I complained.

We went down to the Villa-Ramiro moat, holding on to the rocks projecting from the wall. Down below, we looked for lizards to make them smoke. From there you could see the castle wall and the battlements silhouetted against the sky.

From the top of the wall we watched the bulls, grandpa, grandma, Aunt Clara, Elisa, and I. You were in the city so you couldn't watch from the top of the wall. We could though.

And you didn't see how they made the ring with planks. From the balcony of the house we could see that. And we also watched how they

made the staircase that started from the ground to the top. The village boys walked up it.

You were in the city so you didn't hear grandma tell me that since I was really a girl I would be afraid to climb up the staircase when I was grown up. And you were in the city so you didn't see me run out of the house and climb all the steps to the top while grandma, Aunt Clara, and Elisa screamed.

Your armchair, which used to be covered with a flowered material, was dark green now. When my eyes got used to the dark I could tell.

"My whole life sacrificing myself for you, my whole life. Of course I knew that some day you would not only not thank me but would ask for more. I don't care, you know: if what you always wanted was to make me suffer, then make me suffer. I'm only a mother who wants her children to have everything. Everything, absolutely everything, even if they get it by breaking their poor mother's heart."

The statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was still on the radio. The same doily under the ped-

estal. But you had added two vases with paper flowers, one on the right side of the pedestal and one on the left.

"I couldn't do more than I've done. God is my witness. I've tried to be good to everyone, absolutely everyone, and especially to you, I go on living for you. I've always tried to act the way I should and I think I have. I won't say I never made mistakes, but I want you to know that when I did it was out of carelessness and that as soon as I realized it I stopped."

You didn't have the wall telephone any more. Now you had a table phone with a long cord. So when the telephone rang, you picked up the receiver without standing up, sitting in your chair.

"The gospel says even the holiest man sins seven times a day. So how could I not sin, poor wretch that I am. I don't claim to be a saint, I can't be so perfect. I'm a poor woman who was brought up in a little village of Castile. I can't be a saint. But all the same, I've tried not to do anyone any harm."

The radio was still on your right, on grandma's night table, all you had to do was reach out your arm, without getting up from your chair, to change the station.

The pigeons were fluttering around us. You were standing behind me watching me kneel and feed them bread crumbs out of my hand.

When a pigeon perched on my hand, I stood up slowly so as not to frighten it. They fluttered around us so thickly that we were afraid we might step on one of them.

And one day, when I was going to bring you this pigeon that wasn't afraid, so you could look at it and pet it, I saw you were looking somewhere else. That's when the pigeon flew away.

The first one was carrying the national flag. A sister was leading him. At the window, the mother superior was surrounded by other sisters. One behind the other, all of us students were marching, singing "Spain was the Nation that conquered High Renown."

We all marched forward in Indian file behind the flag-bearer. The sisters signaled to us if we lagged too far behind the one who marched ahead or if we began following the wrong leader. And marching along one behind the other, we

sang "The Virgin of Pilar will not be French."

We kept time to the song by knocking two stones together. The sisters gave little bells to the ones who were on the honor roll. They kept time to the song with their castenettes. And we all sang "The Virgin Mary is our Redeemer."

All in line—one behind the other—we filled the courtyard, making concentric circles. When Sister Mercedes led the flag-bearer, the endless line made a lot more turns. Finally we stopped and the mother superior shouted "Hail Christ the King!" three times and we all answered "Amen" and knocked our stones together and rang our bells.

Grandpa died under the mantle of the Virgin of Pilar.

You told me to go see him. Half-unconscious, grandpa called me by my name. When you told me to kiss him, I kissed him and I said to him: "Grandpa."

He hadn't been shaved for several days and his beard prickled. On the bed was the mantle of the Virgin of Pilar under which Aunt Clotilde and other friends of grandma and Aunt Clara had died.

That was on November third, I remember now.

You told me to leave the room and I went out. Then I heard Aunt Clara, who had stayed in grandpa's room, praying. You told me she was saying the prayer for the dying.

That night, in my bed, I listened to Aunt Clara praying. The prayer I heard her repeating several times until I fell asleep began like this: "Prayer for the dying. Little father, pray with me. (She stopped.) It doesn't matter if you can't talk, pray in your mind, God doesn't care. (She stopped again.) Now that I'm about to die, my God, I accept joyously the pains and sufferings of my agony in order to deserve pardon for my sins."

I don't remember what came next.

From that day on we recited the Rosary in grandpa's room after dinner. During prayers grandpa farted under the mantle of the Virgin of Pilar and I kept my head down to keep from laughing.

Grandma, Aunt Clara, and you took turns reciting the prayer for the dying at grandpa's bedside. In the morning Aunt Clara stopped to make me come in. Half-unconscious, grandpa kissed me and called me by my name. I kissed him and I said: "Grandpa."

Aunt Clara told me to leave the room right away because I shouldn't tire grandpa. When I left I heard Aunt Clara praying.

Grandpa died November fifteenth under the mantle of the Virgin of Pilar, so when we recited the Rosary around the body that night he didn't fart any more.

When I'm through smoking I empty the ashes into the ash tray. I have to tap the pipe several times. Then I put it to my nose and I sniff the bowl. I sniff it for a long time.

Next to the ash tray I keep a big box of matches like the one you had in the kitchen. The plastic tobacco pouch is there too.

This pipe is a "Doctor Plumb."

They told me not to do it. Once a week I wash the pipe in the sink. I don't wash the bowl, just the stem. The nicotine stains my hands. They told me not to do it.

The bowl of the pipe is now very seasoned. A crust has formed inside it. That's why I have to put less and less tobacco in it.

This pipe is a "Doctor Plumb."

At night I leave it on the ash tray, near the matches and the plastic tobacco pouch. I never smoke when I wake up in the morning. I begin smoking after breakfast. I always smoke cheap tobacco, the kind they call gray tobacco.

The bowl is gradually getting filled up with a crust. It's already so thick that soon the bowl will hold almost no tobacco at all. That's why I scratched the inside until I removed the layer of crust. But it doesn't taste the same when I start smoking again.

This pipe, mama, is papa's "Doctor Plumb."

Sometimes the people applauded very loud and sometimes they shouted very loud and sometimes Aunt Clara applauded very loud and sometimes she shouted very loud.

Grandpa explained it all to me. Grandpa knew what it all meant, that's why sometimes when everyone was shouting very loud he applauded.

When we went to the ring, grandma

laughed more than at home. Since she was pleased, she sometimes applauded very loud and sometimes she shouted.

Grandpa told me that the important thing was to last. If you didn't last until the end it was no good. Grandpa knew what it all meant, that's why sometimes when everyone was applauding very loud he shouted.

It was hot so grandma and Aunt Clara rolled up their sleeves and the men took off their jackets.

After the *estocada* the blood poured out of its mouth and it staggered and bellowed. Then I watched the matador wiping the blood off his hands while the crowd applauded louder than ever and grandpa explained to me the three different times you could kill the bull properly.

I told you everything when you came back from the city, and so you could understand it better I made a series of drawings that you keep in the wardrobe drawer near my flower collection.

The cards were carefully laid out on the board. While you were talking to me you held

the rest of the pack in your hand.

"I've done everything I could for all of you, and especially for papa and you. My conscience is clear. No one can blame me for anything, not for anything. You know everyone says I'm a poor widow who's brought up her children properly in spite of everything. Everyone knows it. Everyone praises me for it. What mother would have done as much?"

When you stopped talking your lips were pressed together.

"I want you to know this once and for all: any other mother would have made you both start working, both you and Elisa, as soon as possible, you as a bus boy and Elisa in a dress shop, but I didn't do that. I preferred to sacrifice myself."

Sometimes you said you should have let me become a bricklayer and Elisa a laundress; or else that any other mother would have handed us over to public charity or abandoned us somewhere.

"But I didn't do that because I think only of your happiness and never of my own. Nothing would have been easier for me than to spend all my money enjoying myself. And I assure you there were plenty of opportunities. You don't know anything about life yet. You're an ignorant

child who owes everything, absolutely everything, to his poor martyred mother."

The sideboard was next to the hall door. Through its glass doors I saw the same plates, the same glasses that were always there, after my eyes got used to the darkness. On top was a vase full of old dirty paper flowers.

"I've always thought only of papa and you. I've lived only for him and for you. I couldn't have loved him more than I did when we were still together. When he abandoned you for his ideas, compromising his future and the future of his children, I was the one who assumed responsibility for you and who brought you up as well as I could. I'm the one who gave you everything he should have given you if he had acted like a good father."

When I interrupted you, you put down the pack of cards and you came close to me, and I held my breath.

We got into the car and we went to the Villa-Ramiro station. I thought about all the things I was going to tell you. Once the Puerta del Sol was behind us I could still see the walls.

When I turned my head I saw the castle of Henry of Trastamara and the crows circling over it.

I went in the car with grandpa and Elisa. Grandpa smoked filter-tip cigarettes that he made while we recited the Rosary. The smoke came out of his mouth when he talked as if he were a furnace. Sometimes he held back the smoke for a long time, then a little thread of it came out his nose. Your mouth was different from grandpa's. Yours was pink and moist. Besides, you didn't smoke.

If we had gone out through the Puerta del Ecu instead of taking the Puerta del Sol we would have crossed the bridge, but we would still have seen the walls and crows circling. All of Villa-Ramiro was surrounded by walls; even the battlement that had been destroyed during the seige had already been rebuilt: its lighter color stood out from the rest.

When the car reached the station I got out and waited for you. While I was waiting for you I looked as far down the tracks as I could to see the train. Then I heard the locomotive whistle and finally I saw the train, far away. When it stopped I ran ahead and I was the one you kissed first.

I don't know if he liked watching the snow fall through the bars, mama.

I don't know if he liked watching the specks of dust in the sunbeams, the way I do, mama.

I don't know if he liked red like Elisa or blue like you, mama.

I don't know if he liked playing with the sand on the beach, mama.

I don't know if he liked walking around the harbor, mama.

I don't know if he made footprints in the snow and looked at them afterward or if he walked along the palm trees in Melilla on sunny days, mama.

At the movies, during the newsreels, I saw the airplanes falling in flames. Then I caught my breath and suddenly realized that the theater was very dark.

I remember, the planes in the war newsreels were made out of metal and they had machine guns on their wings and they used them to shoot down other planes that fell in flames. When I

watched these fights I put my feet on my seat and made myself into a ball, hugging my knees.

Once, one of the aviators managed to jump out with his parachute that got caught on a factory chimney. I remember that from the movies.

Often there used to be war newsreels before the picture and sometimes we saw airplanes falling in flames.

The schoolmaster of Villa-Ramiro said it was the aurora borealis. Grandpa had put his overcoat on over his pajamas. The square was full of people. When the schoolmaster spoke they stopped talking.

The curé said the revolutionaries had set the woods on fire. Grandpa was holding me by the hand. The square was full of people. They stopped talking when the curé spoke.

In the darkness you could see a red glow spreading across the sky.

The schoolmaster read the definition of the aurora borealis out of a book. Grandpa was in his socks and he listened without saying a word. The square was full of people who had just got out of bed. As soon as the schoolmaster was

through they began talking about what he had said.

The curé said the anarchists had set the woods on fire. Grandpa didn't let go of my hand. The square was full of people, it was lit up by a red glow. Women were screaming and crying.

A few days later the *Guardia Civil* took the schoolmaster away. Grandma said it was a good thing, he was an anarchist and a revolutionary.

I told Aunt Clara I was going to hurt her. She told me to hit her harder. Then I hit her with my belt. Aunt Clara said:

"Still harder."

I told her I was going to hurt her. When I started again she shrieked at me:

"Harder and faster."

While I was hitting Aunt Clara I could hear her panting.

I hid from you, but when you came back you didn't say anything about it. You didn't scold me for anything, even though I had made a big spot in my underwear.

I had to hit Aunt Clara very hard and she never cried about it. All you could hear was

her panting. Her back was white and her skin was like the skin on your arms. She fell on her knees and covered her eyes with her hands.

All this time you were at the office, and when you came back for lunch you didn't say anything about it and when I gave you my dirty clothes on Saturday you didn't say anything about it.

Afterward Aunt Clara ran into her room without washing my face or saying morning prayers with me.

When grandma found out I had gone down into the moat she didn't let me have anything to eat all afternoon and I wasn't allowed to go out on Sunday.

Even when I wanted to pee I controlled myself all through Sister Isabelle's class and my foot wiggled faster and faster.

When I said bad words like fart and ass, grandma put red peppers in my mouth.

When we went down into the moat after Sister Isabelle's class, we had contests to see who could pee highest on the wall. I didn't win. My friends said I would never win because I didn't

know how to take it out right, so it wasn't any use for me to control myself all that time.

When grandma kept me home Sunday I looked through the window at the people walking around the square. When I laughed during the Rosary grandma put the poker near the end of my finger; then I got a blister full of water.

The neighbors didn't hear us and didn't see us. Even if the windows had been open and the blinds raised I don't think they would have seen us or heard us. When I got to the house the stairway light was already on.

Sometimes you stopped to cry, then you told me: "Wait a minute, I have to get hold of myself," and you began talking again in a choked voice.

At first all I could see was the outline of the furniture and a few shiny things like the telephone and the glass of the photograph on the wall.

I wanted to smoke, but I didn't take out my pipe and you didn't see that I had it in my pocket. I was sitting on a chair at your left listening to you. To your right was the radio and

on top of it the statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus with a vase on each side.

Sometimes you ended a sentence with a sigh. Sometimes you began a sentence with a sigh. Sometimes you sighed in the middle of a sentence.

It was summer so there was no brazier under the table. Once my eyes were used to the dark I realized that the straight chairs, your armchair, and the tablecloth were all of the same dark green material.

The neighbors couldn't hear or see because the blinds were lowered and the windows closed.

Aunt Clara woke me up every morning. You were at the office and you didn't know about it. Since you didn't go to the office on Sundays, you came to wake me up and then we went to mass together.

I served the mass and when communion came I was the one who held the tray under your chin and then you stuck out your tongue —it was red and wet—and you closed your eyes. I couldn't tell the priest that you were my mother because I couldn't talk during mass.

When I rang the bell I knew you were watching me and when I carried the missal I knew you were still watching me, but I couldn't look back at you because you scolded me once for turning my head while I was serving the mass.

When it was over I went through the door near the high altar and I walked down the long nave to where you were sitting; then everyone knew you were my mother.

Then we went out into the street and I asked you if I had rung the bell and carried the missal and served the communion well and you told me:

"Yes."

And sometimes:

"Yes, very well."

There were letters on the locomotive you couldn't see at first glance. They were painted over so that they were black like the rest. Still if you looked at them against the light you could make them out.

Elisa and I read them.

For Christmas Elisa got a doll's house and

I got a locomotive. The doll's house had a kitchen with little faucets, cupboards full of tiny cans, little iron pots and skillets. There were flower pots filled with tiny flowers under the windows. It was under the terrace that we found the letters painted over. You only could see them if you looked at them against the light.

Elisa and I read them.

My wooden locomotive was the scale model of a real locomotive. Santa Claus had left it in my shoe.

On both toys you could see the same letters that said: "With love from papa." Elisa and I read them. Then we told grandma about it and she took the locomotive and the doll's house away from us.

She called me and I went into her room. Then she got up off her knees. A metal statue of Christ on the Cross dominated the room. She lay flat on her stomach and I hit her with my belt and she didn't flinch because I had learned to hit her hard. All I could hear was her panting; from time to time she said: "For our poor grandpa, may God have mercy on his soul!"

Her back was white, her behind was white with a dimple on each side, and her legs were white too. Her face was pressed against the sheets and she couldn't see anything.

Then suddenly she hid herself under the blanket and screamed at me to go away. I left the room and I ran down the hallway.

She called me and I went into her room. Before, she used to come into mine, then I went into her room. In her room, images of the Stations of the Cross were attached to the wall. But we no longer said morning prayers and she no longer scrubbed my face with the fiber mitt. Aunt Clara waited for me naked, lying flat on her stomach under the white sheets.

You explained it all to me, mama, and I said yes, mama. Then you kissed me, mama.

When you gave me your photo, mama, that I wanted to put in my school notebook, under the celluloid, you signed it for me, mama:

"To my darling son, a budding aviator."

You explained everything to me, mama, and I said yes, mama.

You told me, mama, that the uniform is

very handsome and that girls always fall in love with young officers and that I would be the honor of the family. And mama, I said yes, mama. And you kissed me, mama.

You told me, mama, that it was your dream and that you would be so proud to walk beside me. And I told you yes, mama.

Several days later, mama, I told you no. And mama, you told me you'd send me away and you called me a chicken. Then, mama, I said yes, mama. And mama, you kissed me.

You were in the city so you didn't see anything; and afterward I had to tell you all about it.

We had left Villa-Ramiro through the Puerta del Sol. Grandma and Aunt Clara had put on their mantillas. Grandma had put a cross around my neck.

On the way there were groups of women in mantillas. The closer we came the bigger the crowds became. But you didn't see anything. Grandpa didn't see anything either because he said he had things to do.

When we reached the cemetery gates we

lined up. Grandma and Aunt Clara talked with other women, but I don't remember what they talked about any more.

When it was our turn we went in with a group. There was a little courtyard at the entrance to the cemetery. Elisa and I were in the front row so grandma and Aunt Clara didn't need to lift us onto their shoulders.

Lying against the opposite wall were the bodies with bloody heads. The women were screaming and spitting on the bodies. Aunt Clara threw a handful of sand at them, hard. Then Elisa did the same thing; then me.

You were in the city so you didn't see anything. Grandpa said he had things to do so he didn't see anything either.

Talking louder, you said he had no right to spoil his future and the future of his children.

"I didn't spoil his children's future, he did. And not because he wasn't warned. Look at the difference: I'm always worried about your least whim, ready for every kind of sacrifice, and he, without thinking of you for a moment, spoils his future and not only his own, but even his

children's, for the sake of his ideas. He's destroyed everything: our happiness, the family, the house. He's destroyed everything. That's why my life has always been a desperate battle—you don't know what sacrifices it's cost me!—to rebuild everything he's destroyed!"

Your voice echoed in the room's darkness. I was sitting on a chair at your left listening to you.

"As a father, his first duty was to take care of his own family. It was his duty to side with order and moderation. But he went over to the other side: to the side of anarchy, to the side of disorder. How many times I warned him! How many times I told him he should give up his terrible ideas! How many times! You can't understand all that. You were only a child then."

The cards were arranged in four rows. You held the rest of the pack in your hand and put another card face up on the table.

"If he had done his duty he'd be on the winning side today. Today he'd be a father like other fathers. But he spoiled everything for the sake of his ideas. Everything, absolutely everything: his future, his wife's future, and his children's future. How many times I warned him! How many times I told him, in Melilla, that he

shouldn't be so easy on his employees, they were corrupted by anarchist and heretical doctrines! How many times I told him he shouldn't participate in demonstrations that were scandalous for a family man, a father whose duty is to respect order! How many times, my God, how many times! You can't understand all that, you were only a child then."

Behind the closed windows there were the green blinds. Through the window panes you could see where they had been mended. Talking louder, you said he had no right to compromise his future and the future of his children. I watched you but you didn't see me any more.

When the poppy season was over I couldn't pick any more in the fields. I couldn't pick any more and make a bouquet out of them.

When there were no more poppies in the fields of Villa-Ramiro I couldn't pick any more and make them into a bouquet. A bouquet of poppies to which I added some green leaves to make it look prettier.

But in winter there were no more poppies

in the fields of Villa-Ramiro. There were no more red poppies in the wheat fields or in the green meadows.

In summer I could make a whole bouquet out of red poppies and a few green leaves. In summer I could, and in spring.

I used to pick them and rush to give them to you right away, otherwise they wilted. I picked them with long stems; that way it took a little longer for them to wilt.

In Madrid, in the gardens, I couldn't find red poppies, even in midsummer, to make you a bouquet with a few green leaves around it.

It was only in mathematics that I got good grades.

One. Two, two. Three, three, three. Yes. One, two, three. Yes.

I asked her how two and two could make four and she explained it to me. I asked her again and she explained it to me again. I asked her again and she explained it to me again. I was going to ask her again but I didn't.

The sister at school told you that the only subject I was good at was mathematics in spite of my bad memory.

Three, three, three. Two, two. One. Yes. One, two, three. Yes.

The sister told me that two and two make four and that was all there was to it and that two chairs and two chairs make four chairs and that two pencils and two pencils make four pencils and that two cats and two cats make four cats. And I asked her if the two chairs were the same as the other two chairs. And she told me yes. And I asked her if they were the same in the same way that two equals two. And she told me yes, of course. And then I wanted to ask her another question but I didn't.

In Madrid, the instructor told you that mathematics was my strong point.

One, one, one. Two, two. Three. No. One, two, three. Yes.

The sister told me that everyone understood that, and I stopped asking questions. The sister told me that she shouldn't even have to explain such things, and I stopped asking questions.

And the sister told me that two and two make four, that two chairs and two chairs make four chairs, that two cats and two cats make four cats, that two little boys and two little boys make four little boys. (This time she didn't mention pencils.) And I didn't ask any more questions. And then I said: "Are you sure you're not cheating so that it will come out all right?" And she said no, of course not.

It was only in mathematics that my grades were good, not only in Villa-Ramiro but in Madrid too.

One, two, three. Yes.

Here the children don't play matador. Here the children play hide-and-seek and the boys I know play ball during recess.

When the musician played the trumpet call on his paper horn we matadors left our bench in the Plaza Redonda in Villa-Ramiro. Keeping time with the music, we headed for the bench where the president was sitting. We made a bow and stood behind the circle of sand where the ring was. The president threw the key to the

alguazil who rode around the ring on horseback, the key in his hand. Then they opened the *toril* and the bull came out.

Grandma had made a red cape. Grandpa had given me a cane that I used for a muleta.

The bull couldn't kill the matadors unless they were inside the circle of sand. He could attack only in a straight line and head for the cape.

Here the children don't play matador. Here they play hide-and-seek.

The hardest thing was to stick in the banderillas, because then the bull ran straight for your body. When I was sticking in the banderillas he killed me several times, and then next time I had to be the bull.

Some boys cheated: they didn't attack in a straight line and didn't head for the cape but for the matador's body.

Grandpa showed me how to make Chicuelo passes and veronicas. Almost every time that I made a Chicuelo pass or a veronica the bull killed me. But when you came to the house I made Chicuelo passes and veronicas in the hall and you told me it was good and sometimes very good.

The four of us sat around the table when we ate. You were facing me. Behind you was the photograph of Aunt Clotilde and also two tiny photographs of grandma and grandpa under the glass. When my knee touched Aunt Clara's, I pulled it away.

You ate sitting in your armchair and between courses you leaned back. On your right was the radio with the statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus on top on its doily. From your armchair you could change the station without getting up. Aunt Clara was on my left but I didn't look at her.

You leaned forward to eat and when you smiled two dimples showed in your cheeks. The radio stood on grandma's old night table. In the drawer of this table—where she used to keep her medals, her little missals, her coughdrops—you now kept your pack of cards, a big notebook, and some papers. In the bottom part of the night table—where grandma used to put her chamber pot—you now kept the telephone directory.

You sliced me some bread and I poured water into your glass. When Aunt Clara mentioned grandpa she said: "Poor grandpa, may God have mercy on his soul!" and her voice suddenly

changed. I didn't talk to Aunt Clara when we were at table.

Since we left Melilla when I was only three I hardly remember anything. You told me most things. You repeated them often. I remember other things you didn't tell me.

Since I left Villa-Ramiro when I was eight I remember almost everything. You were working in the city while we were living in Villa-Ramiro, so I often told you about the things that happened that you didn't see.

Later we lived in Madrid until I came here. Grandpa and grandma died soon after we got there, so Elisa, you, and I came home alone. Aunt Clara lived with us too.

When they gave me fifteen days' vacation, I went to see you one afternoon. When I came in you closed the window and lowered the blinds. When I left, you kissed me at the door in the dark so as not to use up too much electricity.

When I climb up the rock in the park during recess I stand on the top and look at the horizon sometimes. Then when I come back to my room I get into bed and wait. Often it's raining—today it's raining too—and, here in my room, I hear the water running in the rainspout.

Before, they didn't let me go to the park so I couldn't ever climb up the rock and look at the horizon sometimes. But now I go to the park during recess and I walk until I reach the rock.

Before, they didn't let me smoke, but now they let me; that's why I'm smoking the "Doctor Plumb" pipe. After dinner I take a walk in the park, then I go to bed.

The first day the nurse laughed when she saw me put the thermometer in my mouth. She told me I should take my temperature in the rectum, and she laughed.

Before, I used to eat in bed, but now I eat in the dining room. After meals I take a walk in the park as far as the rock. I climb up it and look at the horizon sometimes.

When I get back to my room I go to bed and I wait.

"Why should I have talked to you about your father? So that you should be unhappy thinking about your unworthy father? I've spared you every kind of suffering, that's always been my only desire. And if I've never mentioned him to you, believe me it's only because of my great love for him in spite of everything and because of my love for you. My conscience is clear. I've done my duty as a mother and my duty as a wife."

Your eyes were swollen: there were rings under each one. Before, you put grease on your face and I went to bed without kissing you. You said spots came because your liver was bothering you.

"Even so I wanted you and your sister to respect his memory. And so you wouldn't have bad things to think about him, I've always concealed his faults from you. Why should you have known about them? So you should be proud of your poor martyred mother. I've spared you every kind of suffering. Every kind!"

Your hair was tangled. There were white hairs in with the black. When I first came in, before my eyes were used to the dark, I thought

your hair was gray. Before, you used to dye it yourself in the sink, I helped you.

"What could I tell you about him without mentioning his faults? Wasn't it better not to say anything at all, both for him—for his memory—and for you? And even today I refuse to talk about him to you. I won't say anything, even if you beg me to. How could I be cruel enough to show my children all their father's errors and faults? Even a father like yours who spoiled his future and his children's future deserves the respect of silence. And I want you to know you must never speak badly of him in my presence no matter how much he deserves it."

When I came in your eyes were shining in the darkness like the telephone and the glass over the photograph on the wall. When you said good-by to me at the door, you were crying.

"Besides he never bothered about you. Often we would go to the beach and instead of staying with you like any father who loves his children, he went to talk with his friends. But I don't want to tell you anything bad about him. I don't want you to have a bad memory of him. I don't want you to and I won't allow it."

When we went to the park with you in summer you wore white clothes. When you turned your skirt went up almost like a dancer's. You laughed under the trees when I told you stories. The sun shining through the branches fell on your face.

You had red lips and your hair was black and curly. The other children's mothers had neither black and curly hair nor white dresses that went up when they turned.

I was playing cops and robbers in the square. You watched me, sitting on the bench in your white dress that also had a white cloth belt. But you almost never knew when I killed one of my enemies, so I stopped looking at you for a while.

When we came back to the house you took off your shoes and walked barefoot. Then you unhooked your girdle in front of us and I went out of the room.

I can find us in the photographs from Melilla, you and me, but he isn't in any of them. And when I asked you to show me one of him you told me you didn't have any.

In my first communion photograph I'm standing dressed all in white next to the statue of the Virgin. The day you took me to church and when they gave me the communion, the wafer didn't stick in my mouth like it did in Elisa's; I rolled it up in my tongue and I swallowed it. Later on, when I went to the bathroom, I looked carefully, but there wasn't anything.

In the photographs from Madrid, Elisa is with us. In the photograph taken on the street, we're standing together. Your hands are resting on our shoulders. It was Aunt Clara who photographed us that day with a friend's camera. I remember you had an argument about how it worked. Out of the eight pictures on the reel only the first one came out. You said: "I told you you shouldn't do it that way." Aunt Clara said: "I told you if we took them that way we'd expose the film."

Neither the photographs from Villa-Ramiro nor the photographs from Madrid are cut up. No pieces are missing from the photographs from Madrid nor from the photographs

from Villa-Ramiro. Pieces are missing only from the photographs from Melilla which someone has cut off with a scissors.

They told me gasoline. I looked for gasoline. I couldn't find gasoline. It was rationed then. I looked for gasoline. I found gasoline. A man was selling gasoline for cigarette lighters. I bought the can. I took it to school. When they made me leave the classroom I stayed in the schoolyard. I looked all around. I saw that no one was coming. I poured the gasoline on the radiator. I ran away. I hid in the subway. I waited an hour. I went back to class. The school had not caught on fire.

When I started at the Madrid school that specialized in preparing for the air force entrance exams, I used to sit in the last row so I could hide from the teachers, whom you had told when you went to see them to keep an eye on me, for you said I had to be watched closely so as to compensate for my lack of enthusiasm for an air force career, and by staying so far away from the teacher I managed to get through the hour by looking at my classmates' heads and even at the clouds going by through a window, which I

couldn't have seen if I'd been sitting in the first row, and which kept me from paying attention to the teacher's explanations so that when the teacher suddenly asked me a question, he realized I wasn't listening—I could tell from his scolding and when he made me leave the classroom—and called you up to tell you about my indifference to my studies, and that's why, when I came home, you scolded me all over again and told me that I'd never come to anything in life, that I was wasting the best years of my youth and my only chance of getting a job as honorable and advantageous as being an officer in the Spanish Air Force.

They made me leave the classroom. I went down to the cellar. I opened the boiler-room door. The logs were piled up there. I closed the door. I went upstairs. I went to get my briefcase. I took out a few sheets of paper. I went back down to the cellar. I set fire to the sheets of paper with a match. I opened the boiler-room door. I threw the burning paper onto the logs. I ran out. I hid in the subway. I waited for an hour. I went back to the school. The firemen were there. The school principal was talking. He said: "There were almost no damages." He said: "They caught it in time." He said: "A spark must have jumped out of the boilers and fallen on the logs."

Aunt Clara put it on me around the tops of my thighs—her hands were cold, white, and thin—and she pulled it tight. When I came in this time Aunt Clara was not lying on her stomach naked on the bed. Aunt Clara was waiting for me standing up, wearing her kimono. You didn't know anything about it and I never told you.

I stared at the floor, still holding the belt in my hand, but that day Aunt Clara wasn't lying naked on the bed. I didn't look at her when she was talking to me or even when she put it on me.

Then we went to mass to take communion. While I was walking it hurt me and I limped. Aunt Clara stayed on her knees the whole time and so did I. It hurt me more and more.

When I got home she took off my trousers again and took away the haircloth belt. It was pulled so tight that when she took it off with her hands the pain got worse and a few drops of sperm came out.

Then we prayed on our knees and Aunt Clara lay down on her stomach on the bed and I hit her. But you never knew anything about it and I never told you.

We went to the wall and we jumped across the battlements one after the other. The ones close to the castle were narrow and we jumped across them all in a row. The ones facing away from the church were wide so we couldn't jump across them. Then we climbed down the drawbridge wall to the moat.

From the top of the wall we could see the bulls coming and also the cars of the French people driving in a row toward Portugal. From the moat you could see the sky overhead and the crows circling around the castle.

In the moat, we used to play bulls and whip. In whip you had to play with a knucklebone. If you made it fall upside down you were king, if you made it fall right side up you were executioner, if you made it fall on its side you "passed," and if you made it fall on the curved side the executioner whipped you as often as the king told him to.

Grandma didn't allow me to play in the moat and I tried not to. My friends called me a girl if I didn't play with them and I tried to.

If the window had been open and the blinds up no one outside would have heard anything or seen anything. You didn't talk very loud. Besides it was almost dark.

"What good did it do him to deny the evidence? Everyone in Melilla knew about it. But not content with spoiling his future, he even wanted to deny everything in front of his judges. Why? It only made things worse for him. Things would have been different if he had confessed right away, the way I told him to. But he was always weak, he never had any character. It would have been better for him to listen to the advice of his loving wife. Because in spite of everything I've always loved him with all my heart, and even today I still cherish his memory. That's why I never remarried. And why not? Don't think I didn't have chances, but I was thinking of him, and of you. I swore to love him forever and I've gone on loving him forever and besides I didn't want you to have a stepfather."

When you stopped talking I could hear the clock ticking on the wall. In the evening, you stood on a chair and you opened the little glass door and you wound it with a big iron key.

"Believe me I didn't make any of it up. I told nothing but the truth, which could only help him in the circumstances. But as I might have expected, considering his ingratitude, not only did he hold it against me, but he called me names. What I've had to put up with! Just when I sacrificed myself most for him and for you, you showed me the most ingratitude. Always protecting your happiness, night and day, and that's how you've thanked me for it! But it's my fate to be a martyr. You don't know much about it, I've hidden all my sufferings from you. I've always preferred to suffer in silence. As the gospel says, never let your left hand know what whips your right hand is holding."

While you were talking the telephone didn't ring and no one knocked at the door.

"I only told the judges the truth. What he should have told them right away, so as not to make things worse for himself. As always, like any wife who loves her husband, I tried to do my best for him, and I did. What would've been the use of saying it wasn't true? They would have sentenced him anyway. Thanks to my evidence, the judges saw how obedient I was and felt inclined to be more merciful toward him. But he insisted on closing every door that might have been useful to him. How much better it

would have been for him and for you to give in right at the start and to admit all his faults! But he never knew how to behave. What would have become of him if I hadn't been there!"

On the table, near the telephone, were the glasses you used for reading. You had probably used them for playing solitaire.

"I've never mentioned anything about this to you because I love you so much. I don't want you to have a bad memory of your father. I've preferred not to mention his mistakes. But since I've told you all this today, I want you to know that your father didn't stop there, and that he even called me names and accused me of denouncing him. All my life I've had to drink the cup of affliction to the dregs. All my life I've been paid back evil for good. If only you knew how all these things break my poor martyr's heart."

You told me to look at myself in the mirror to make sure I was standing straight. You sat down on a chair and you waited. When I came into the room I looked at myself in the mirror and then I walked toward you and I kissed your hand.

You told me not to make any noise when I kissed your hand and then I went out of the room again. You waited for me on a chair. When I came in I looked at myself in the mirror, I walked toward you, and then I kissed your hand.

You told me to take only the tips of your fingers and then I went out of the room again. I came back in and I walked toward where you were sitting, after looking at myself in the mirror. Then I kissed your hand without making any noise and taking only the tips of your fingers.

You told me not to raise your hand, to bend down to it. I went out of the room again and I came back in right away and, after looking at myself in the mirror, I kissed your hand without making any noise and taking only the tips of your fingers and bending down to it.

Then you said: "Fine." But when the ladies came to visit you, I didn't kiss their hands and you punished me, and I told you that I was too ashamed.

It was sunny that day on the beach at Melilla, while the man was burying my feet in the sand.

You told me that we had gone out in a fishing boat and that we had climbed onto it by a wooden ladder without a rope to hold on to.

While I'm writing to you, I'm smoking the "Doctor Plumb" pipe. He probably heard the verdict with this pipe in his coat pocket.

One of the pictures you still have from Melilla is of me dressed up as Pierrot. A man is holding me in his arms. All you can see are his hands and a part of his coat sleeve. The rest has been cut away with scissors.

You often told me that you and Elisa and I crossed the Strait of Gibraltar on a fishing boat and then took the train to Villa-Ramiro.

The "Doctor Plumb" pipe has a complicated filter in its stem. Every week I clean it carefully because the nicotine sticks in the complicated filter of papa's "Doctor Plumb" pipe—"perfect pipe," "C.J.V.," "best make."

When I saw her I never talked to her and so no one knew what was happening. If I had to go back to the house with her I waited so as not to climb the stairs at the same time and if I met her in the street I turned in the opposite direction.

But you didn't know anything about it.

To say good night I always chose the moment when she was leaving the dining room—to go to the toilet or the kitchen or somewhere—so that I didn't have to kiss her or say "Until-tomorrow-God-willing and good night."

Every morning when she called me into her room I only looked at her when she turned her back because then I knew that she didn't see me. And when she groaned or when she said "louder" I didn't answer. In the evening, when she heard us say our Rosary, I didn't look at her.

But you didn't know anything about it.

Military spirit zero" is what they wrote on my report card. You beat me with the ruler. I locked myself in the bathroom. I cried in the bathroom. I looked at myself in the mirror and I cried.

Then you told me I should try harder. You asked me if I would and I said yes. You told me I should try to make you happy by passing the army entrance examination so that you could go out walking with me in the Spanish Air Force officers' uniform and I told you I would. You

told me I would have a brilliant future as a soldier and I said "Yes."

"The student shows no interest for the army," "Military spirit zero," "Military spirit zero," "Military spirit zero," "The student takes no interest in his courses," "Military spirit zero," "Military spirit zero," "The student gives no indication of any desire to improve," "Military spirit zero." Every fifteen days the teachers wrote their grades on the report card, that was why you beat me with the ruler, that was why I locked myself in the bathroom afterward and that was why I had black and blue marks on my arms and back which I looked at in the mirror.

When you asked me if I was going to be a good student, just to make you happy I answered "Yes."

The castle of Villa-Ramiro rises near the big gate in the wall. The crows come there to roost. And when my friends threw stones, they circled around inside, then flew away. I never went in there by myself.

You told me the castle of Villa-Ramiro was built by King Henry of Trastamara to protect

himself from the Moors. It was empty inside and there was nothing left except a platform in the middle and a staircase to the top.

The castle of Villa-Ramiro was higher than the highest houses in the village. The castle of Villa-Ramiro was divided into two parts, as if one big hollow stone die were set on another one that was even bigger.

Even when the sun was shining, it was dark inside the castle of Villa-Ramiro. When I went in there with my friends, we could hear the crows croaking along the walls. I never went in there alone.

Grandma said she was going to leave me in the castle all night long to make me get over being afraid.

Sitting in your armchair in the dark, you talked to me. I sat on a chair to your left, listening. I rested my feet on the rung of the chair. Sometimes you put out a hand to caress my face and then I leaned away.

"I should have shown you the letter from the warden of the prison. I've kept it all this

time. But I never wanted you to know some things, even if learning about them would only have made you love your poor mother even more. But you know what my motto has always been: never worry about myself so I could sacrifice myself to you completely. And a lot of good it's done me. . . ."

You sighed. You sighed again. Then you stopped talking for a minute.

"The warden of the prison told me that he could tell from the letters I wrote your father that I was a true Spanish woman and a Christian. That was the way his letter began. More than half of it was flattering to me; he recognized all the difficulties I had bringing up my children properly. I've kept that letter and I'll keep it all my life. If you want I'll show it to you."

We went into the summer dining room. The other ten rooms were empty, the three halls were empty, the bathroom was empty, the kitchen was empty.

"If you asked me I would have given it to you. What have you ever asked me for that I haven't given you? Why did you need to read the letter behind my back? Haven't I told you that everything I have is yours, that I keep no secrets from you? Why did you need to go through the storage closet like a thief while I

was away to read that letter? Would I have refused to give it to you? Tell me."

The two balconies of the winter dining room that overlooked the street were hermetically closed. And no daylight reached the hallway from the rooms that opened off it.

"Then if you read it what can I tell you that you don't know already? You learned with your own eyes that even people who don't know me are moved by my troubles and by the sacrifices I've made to bring up my children properly. And you can see they don't reproach me for my little mistakes, mistakes a poor mother like me, with no one to advise her and without education, can't help making. They've always been little mistakes and I've never meant to do them, but your father's mistakes were deliberate, premeditated, and monstrous. And the warden doesn't blame me for my mistakes; he merely points them out, otherwise I wouldn't have seen them. I always try to act for the best, my intentions are always good. The warden said I shouldn't write any more letters like the ones I wrote my husband. He said that after his attempted suicide he was suffering from great depression. With all his tricks, your father got what he wanted: he impressed the warden and made him think he

wasn't all there. And when he compromised his children's future, I suppose he wasn't all there then either? But I've always had to sacrifice myself for everybody. That's why I did what they said: I didn't write him again, I'm not a hypocrite, I couldn't write him to congratulate him and tell him he had done right."

A dog howled once in the courtyard, then howled again. It must have been a police dog.

I thought I could start by saying "My mama is a flower" or else "My mama is a rose." The sister told me that was fine. I asked her if it was better with the rose or with the flower. The sister told me with the flower.

I thought I could start by saying "My mama is the prettiest flower." The sister told me to leave the first line alone and go on to the next. I began thinking about the second line.

I thought I could say "My mama is the prettiest flower—and I love her more than a motor." I read it aloud and I saw that it rhymed. The sister told me it was too ordinary.

"My mama is the prettiest flower—and I love her every hour," "My mama is the prettiest flower—I hope God makes her happier," "My mama is the prettiest flower—from Spain to the Equator." The sister decided on "My mama is the prettiest flower—and I love her every hour."

When you came to Villa-Ramiro, you read my poem in the dining room. My face was very hot. Then you kissed me. I learned it by heart. I haven't forgotten it:

"My mama is the prettiest flower
and I love her every hour
I'll love her more each day
and I'll remember her always."

And what about you, mama. Do you remember?

I'm smoking the "Doctor Plumb" pipe.

Maybe he smoked gray tobacco, like I do.

Maybe he didn't swallow the smoke, like I do.

Maybe he put orange peel in his tobacco pouch, like I do.

I'm smoking the "Doctor Plumb" pipe.

You never smoked. Grandma never smoked either. Aunt Clara didn't smoke either. Grandpa was a man and he smoked cigarettes until he died. Grandpa made them while we were saying our Rosary. When there were bullfights, grandpa smoked a cigar. But grandpa never smoked the pipe.

Maybe he knew how to make smoke rings, like I do.

I'm smoking the "Doctor Plumb" pipe.

Maybe he used matches and not a cigarette lighter, like I do.

Maybe he knew how to make the smoke come out of his nose, like I do.

I'm smoking the "Doctor Plumb" pipe.

I'm smoking papa's "Doctor Plumb" pipe.

I'm still smoking papa's "Doctor Plumb" pipe, mama.

I knew everyone would look if I took the book away. I knew that if I didn't sit down on the benches against the wall in the Madrid school

everyone would look.

You made it for me yourself. You took my measurements with a dressmaker's tape. You used a pattern you made with newspaper and pins.

When it was cold I could wear my coat in the street. When it wasn't cold I couldn't wear it. When it wasn't cold I held my briefcase in front of me in the street.

You sewed it yourself on the sewing machine. I helped you thread the needle because you said I did it faster than you. I helped you bring the pieces too.

I told you I didn't want to wear it, but you said I had to. That's why I didn't play during recess and I stayed on a bench holding a book in front of it; that's why I kept my coat on in class whenever I could.

I tried it on and looked at myself in the mirror. You asked me if I wanted it longer or shorter. I told you to leave it the way it was. Then you asked me if I wanted the pocket on the side seam or diagonal. I told you I wanted it diagonal like the photograph in the catalogue.

When the teacher called me to the blackboard and he told me to turn around and face the class to say the lesson louder, I heard someone say:

"Look, he has a pocket straight across, he must have put his pants on wrong!"

Aunt Clara put a towel around each of my wrists, then she tied me up with a cord she had attached to each side of the bed. Her hands were cold. I kept my eyes closed; when I opened them I saw the bulb hanging from the ceiling.

Aunt Clara didn't put a towel around my ankles. She tied them with a string on each side of the bed. I felt her cold hands but I didn't look at her.

Aunt Clara hit me with the belt. So that no one would hear us, I didn't cry out. Then she took them both in her hands. I told her not to do that. Aunt Clara said Christ hadn't hesitated to suffer for our salvation. She squeezed them gradually. Then I screamed.

Aunt Clara panted the way she did when I whipped her. Then I felt that something different was happening. When it was over Aunt Clara told me I should go to confession right away.

In Madrid, we couldn't kill the pig every year any more the way we did in Villa-Ramiro. In Madrid, there were no acorns to fatten the pig with.

In Madrid, there were no walls the way there were in Villa-Ramiro. In Madrid, there was no more room to build walls.

In Madrid, there was no castle the way there was in Villa-Ramiro. In Madrid, there were no crows to roost in a castle.

Here there are no pigs either, and no walls, and no castle. Here you almost never see the sun and it rains so much there are neither pigs, nor walls, nor castle.

In Madrid, there were no poppies in the fields the way there were in Villa-Ramiro. In Madrid, they forgot to take poppies to the florist shops.

In Madrid, there's no moat the way there is in Villa-Ramiro for the men to pee in. In Madrid, the men pee at home.

In Madrid, the donkeys don't walk loose in the street the way they did in Villa-Ramiro. In Madrid, there's only one donkey that walks around the square with children on it.

I haven't seen any poppies here yet, or any

donkeys, or any ditches. Here we sometimes pee into a big glass the nurse takes away to make an analysis.

The convent bells were ringing.

"What would you have thought if I had committed suicide when I found I had to bring you up alone? You would've thought I was a worthless mother to abandon her children just when they needed her most. And you would have been right."

The convent bells were ringing.

"If you only knew how many times I thought of suicide! And why didn't I do it? Because I knew it was my duty to stay here with you and take care of you and protect you."

The convent bells were ringing.

"It would have been so cowardly. It was the best solution for me, if I'd been selfish and thought only of myself."

The convent bells were ringing. Sometimes when I was alone in the house, I undressed opposite the barred windows of the convent.

"But not content with acting the way he had, your father tried to commit suicide too.

Right up to the end he was afraid to face life. What would have become of him and of you if I hadn't been there?"

The convent bells were ringing full peal.

"There's no excuse for him. I tell you this myself, even though I loved him so much. You're still too young to understand it all."

The convent bells were ringing full peal.

"He was in prison; how much I would have given to be there without any worries, without having to struggle to bring up my children properly! My situation was much harder than his, but while I went on making sacrifices for my children, he tried to kill himself."

The convent bells were ringing full peal. The windows were closed and the blinds lowered but I could still hear the convent bells ringing full peal. The balcony of the winter dining room was opposite the barred windows of the convent. Sometimes when you were at the office and I was alone in the house studying for the army entrance examinations, I took off my clothes opposite the convent windows and I peed.

No one, mama, not Pepitos' mama, not the sacristan's wife, not Doña Carmen, not the doctor's wife, not the sisters from school, not Aunt Clara's friends—Mercedes, Lucia, Rosita, Isabel—not the ladies from the Sisterhood of Saint Vincent de Paul, not Señora Rodriguez, not grandma, not the mamas of Elisa's friends—Carmencita's mama, Lolita's mama, Nieves' mama, Pilar's mama—not the ladies from Villa-Ramiro, not the neighbor ladies from Madrid, not grandpa's goddaughter, not Doña Consuelo, not Asuncion the maid from Villa-Ramiro, not Mari Carmen the maid from Madrid, not Mari Carmen the mayor's daughter, not Mari Carmen the dairy maid, not Mari Carmen the count's granddaughter, not the dressmaker, not the candy seller, not Truman's wife, not Doña Rita, not the nurses from the sanatorium, not Doña Esperanza, not Doña Asuncion, not Greta Garbo—not any other actress—not the fritter vendor, not the wife of the president of the Catholic Action Committee, not Señora Lopez, not Señora Sanchez, not the newspaper vendor, not Aunt Clara, not Elisa, no one, mama, no one was like you.

No one, mama, was like you. I looked hard, mama, but no one was like you. No one had a

tongue so wet or knees so white as you, mama. No one.

Every year ninety candidates were accepted into the Spanish Air Force: forty future pilots, forty future members of the auxiliary corps of aviation troops, and ten future administration officers.

Even though you called me a chicken I told you I chose administration.

After four years' study at military school the ninety candidates became forty lieutenant pilots, forty lieutenants in the aviation troops, and ten administration lieutenants.

Even though you called me chicken you let me choose administration.

Later on, when people asked you what I was studying, you told them I was studying to be an officer in the Spanish Air Force; when they asked you: "To be a pilot?" you answered: "He'll be an officer in the Spanish Air Force," and when they asked you: "But will he be flying?" you answered: "He'll be an officer in the Spanish Air Force." The day the neighbor lady asked you: "Then he'll be in the administra-

tion?" You didn't answer at first and then you said: "Yes."

The bat had tiny eyes. Aunt Clara was sitting on a chair reading. The bat's back was covered with fine hair. Aunt Clara wasn't wearing stockings. The bat stayed motionless, its wings spread. Aunt Clara was barefoot. The bat's blind eyes stayed open. Aunt Clara was barefoot and her knees showed. The bat had a tiny sharp muzzle. Aunt Clara's skirt didn't hide her knees. She was barefoot.

The drain was in a corner of the kitchen, covered with a wet rag. The blinds were lowered and kept the sun's rays out. Sometimes there was a barking in the silence.

The bat had two feet with tiny claws. Aunt Clara was reading and fanning herself. The bat couldn't escape. Aunt Clara was wearing a low-necked sleeveless blouse. I grabbed the bat by the ends of its wings. I saw Aunt Clara reading and fanning herself through the keyhole.

On days like this we didn't eat anything hot. Often you made cold soup with tomatoes, bread, wine, lemon juice, pieces of sausage and

ham, pickles, olive oil, and orange sections.

I opened the cellar door and I let the bat fly away in the dark. Aunt Clara, barefoot and her knees showing, went on reading and fanning herself when I looked at her the last time through the keyhole.

I told you: "First of all, honor God above all things."

And you told me: "Yes."

And I asked you what it meant to honor God above all things.

And you told me: "It means you must always honor God above all things."

And I said: "Oh!" Then I told you: "Second, do not blaspheme."

And you told me: "Yes."

And I asked you what it meant not to blaspheme.

And you told me: "It means you must never blaspheme."

And I said: "Oh!" Then I told you: "Third, observe the Holy Days."

And you told me: "Yes."

And I asked you what it meant to observe the Holy Days.

And you told me: "It means you must always observe the Holy Days."

And I said: "Oh!"

One, two, three. Yes.

And I told you: "Fourth, honor your father and mother."

And you told me: "Yes."

And I asked you what it meant to honor your father and mother.

And you told me: "It means you must always honor your father and mother."

And I said: "Oh!" And then I told you: "Fifth, do not kill."

And you told me: "Yes."

And I asked you what it meant not to kill.

And you told me: "It means you must never kill."

And I said: "Oh!" And then I told you: "Sixth, do not fornicate."

And you told me: "Yes!"

And I asked you what it meant not to fornicate.

And you told me: "It means you must

never fornicate."

And I said: "Oh!"

Four, five, six. Yes.

And I asked you: Why?"

And you said: "What?"

And I asked you: "Why not fornicate?"

And you told me: "Because the catechism says not to."

And I said: "Oh!" And then I asked you: "But when?"

And you told me: "Well, never."

And I asked you: "But where?"

And you told me: "Well, everywhere."

And I said: "Oh!" And then I said: "Oh!" And then I asked you: "Is that something for grownups?"

And you told me: "Yes."

A few months after grandpa died grandma died under the mantle of the Virgin of Pilar. When someone rang at the door, you and Aunt Clara started crying. Sometimes Aunt Clara moaned and wailed. I thought about hell

and the martyrs and the torture of Damiens, but once I stopped concentrating I laughed.

You put a silver crucifix and a gold rosary in grandma's hands. Aunt Clara cried and sprayed perfume around the room, but grandma smelled worse and worse. I stared as hard as I could at one of the candles but the tears wouldn't run out of my eyes.

Grandma was all white and her nose had a pinched look. When the undertaker's men came, Aunt Clara was crying and howling but she took the crucifix and the rosary away from grandma and locked them up in the iron box in the closet. I thought about the devil and the Roman slaves and the tonsil operation, but I had to hide my face with my handkerchief so they wouldn't see I was laughing.

Then the men picked up the coffin and carried it out of the room without bumping into the walls or the windowpanes. Aunt Clara cried louder than ever from the window, while her friends held her up. Then I locked myself in the toilet and I laughed so hard that tears came to my eyes.

The doors of the room were closed, the windows were closed too. The room was a regular cube without any openings.

"Your father didn't go crazy in prison, your father was always crazy. If he hadn't been, how could he have committed the sins he committed? And God keep me from speaking evil of him, my beloved husband. All my life I've loved him, I've taken care of him, I've done everything for him. What would another woman have done in my place? You're still too young to be able to understand all this, you don't know what life is, I've spared you every suffering. Another woman would have remarried and given you a stepfather. That would have been so easy for me! I would have stopped working and suffering, but I didn't want to, first because I loved you so much that only your happiness meant anything to me, and then because I could never love more than one man in my life: my husband."

The room was like a regular cube filled with darkness. Gradually I made out the things that were in it.

"I was the one who should have gone crazy with grief and suffering. But I wanted to keep my balance no matter how great my sacrifices

so I could take care of you, so I could rescue you and your sister. It's your filial duty to be grateful to me for all my sacrifices. Other children would kiss the ground I walk on. I'm not asking that of you: I'm only asking you to realize what I've done for you."

The four walls—with the doors and windows closed—and the ceiling and the floor formed the six faces of a regular square prism. Inside you talked to me and I listened to you. When you stopped talking I could hear the clock ticking.

"Everyone in Melilla knew about it. Ask anyone you want. A man who was all there wouldn't have acted the way he did. That's why I can tell you he didn't go crazy in prison, he was crazy before. The letters I wrote him were the letters any other woman in my position —filled with grief and suffering—would have written to the man who was the cause of it all. But I won't allow you to have a bad opinion of him. You must cherish his memory and love and respect him in spite of everything, the way I cherish his memory and love and respect him myself. His being crazy excuses all his faults, don't forget that."

When we left Villa-Ramiro for Madrid, I carried it on the train and it didn't get broken.

In the beginning, I put a lot of characters in it. Afterward when I only put a few in it, I could move them around without bumping them into each other.

I made it in Villa-Ramiro out of a cardboard box. The inside was lit by two concealed candles.

In the beginning, I used a lot of painted sets in each play. Afterward when I kept only one, you didn't have to wait for me to change them.

Elisa didn't like reading the script so I played all the roles, changing my voice for each one.

In the beginning, the characters came in and went out all the time. Afterward when they didn't come in and go out almost at all any more, you could follow what they were saying better.

In Madrid, I replaced the two candles by two electric lights.

In the beginning, the characters did important things. Afterward when they did the same things we did, you had a lot more to say about the plays.

In Madrid, I kept it in my room. From time to time I gave a performance for you.

In the beginning, I divided each play into several acts. Afterward when I joined them all into one act, you paid more attention.

Each character was placed on a wooden wand and then I could move them around from outside.

In the beginning, my theater was made out of cardboard. Afterward, in Madrid, when I made one out of wood, you liked it better.

Neither Elisa, nor Aunt Clara, nor grandpa, nor grandma watched the performances. Only you watched them. Now that you're not here I give them for myself.

I'm watching the rain on the windows of my room. The raindrops slide by, transparent. The gray sky is foggy and low.

I'm smoking the "Doctor Plumb" pipe that was hidden with his other things in the trunk in the storage closet.

It is raining and I can hear water running in the rainspout. It began raining early this morning. It is three in the afternoon and it's still raining.

In my mouth is the "Doctor Plumb" pipe I stole out of the trunk in the storage closet.

She came in to get me and then I locked myself in the bathroom. When she knocked on the door I leaned against it and when she said: "Come out," I didn't answer. You had just gone to the office so you didn't know anything about it. Then she knocked again and I sat down on the edge of the tub.

She knocked again and she went away. I heard her go away then slam the door of her room. Then I didn't hear anything more, although I put my ear to the door.

Then I opened the door and I sat down on the edge of the tub. Then I left the bathroom and went into my room and left my door open.

When I wanted to go into her room she told me: "Don't come in," and I stood in the doorway. You were at the office and you didn't know anything about it. Aunt Clara stayed in her room without making any noise while I waited behind the door, holding the two towels.

She asked me: "What are you doing here?"

And I said: "Nothing."

And she told me: "Then go away!"
And so I went away.

I said "Good."
You said "Yes."
She said "Of course."
We said "Good."
You said "Yes."
They said "Of course."

I would say "No."
I will say "Good."
I say "Perhaps."

"Say yes."
"Let us say yes."
"Say yes."

I said "Yes."
You said "Why not."
She said "Yes, of course."
We said "Yes."
You said "Why not."
They said "Yes, of course."

I say "Yes."
I had said "Yes."
I have said "Yes."
I was saying "Yes."

I would have said "No."
I would say "No."

I will say "Good."
I will have said "Good."

Have I said?
Have you said?
Has she said?
Have we said?
Have you said?
Have they said?

Yes, I have said.
You have said.
She has said.
We have said.
You have said.
They have said.

The drums of the Romans echoed through the night: rat-ratatat-rat-ratatat.

Aunt Clara was barefoot and wearing a wooden cross and her feet dragged chains a yard long. When she passed in front of us grandma screamed: "My daughter!"

The drums of the Romans echoed through the night.

Ecce Homo's chariot stopped. The runners set down the shafts. The choirboy let each of them drink out of a wine gourd. Half way through, two other boys carrying a water jar filled up the gourd.

The drums of the Romans stopped. From a balcony someone began singing to Jesus.

One of the porters said: "One, two, three." Ecce Homo's chariot started again. The runners' shirts were drenched with sweat and torn at the shoulders.

The drums of the Romans echoed through the night: rat-ratatat-rat-ratatat.

Three penitents passed by carrying three crosses like Aunt Clara's. Their feet were dragging long chains like hers. One of them was limping.

The drums of the Romans echoed through the night.

The bishop passed, wearing his gold-embroidered cape. Two curés were carrying his train. Behind the bishop walked several priests dressed in their albs.

The drums of the Romans echoed through the night.

The members of the brotherhood went by, hooded. Between the two rows of hoods was a female penitent on her knees, leaning on a little girl of about seven. She was crying and praying aloud.

The drums of the Romans echoed through the night.

Two penitents carrying crosses and chains like Aunt Clara's went by. One of them fell, then he stood up and went on.

The drums of the Romans echoed through the night.

A penitent passed carrying a larger cross. He was walking slowly. Heavy chains about four yards long were fastened to his feet. The women screamed; some wept. And since Elisa wanted to pee grandma took her into a corner where she peed, crouching, her behind showing.

The drums of the Romans echoed through the night: rat-ratatat-rat-ratatat: rat-ratatat-rat-ratatat-rat-ratat.

They told me it was an orchid. So I chose the orchid. They put it in a transparent box and I gave it to you. Then I told you that when I was an officer in the Spanish Air Force I would give you a transparent box with an orchid inside every week.

"All I ever wanted was your happiness. I was only doing my best, may God be my witness, when I thought that a military career would be best for you."

In the room with the doors and windows shut and the blinds lowered you talked to me and almost never looked at me.

"Today you'd be an officer. You'd have good pay, a good job, and everyone would envy you. What mother—what real mother—would have advised you not to become an officer? All I did was advise you. And you know it. You're the one who made the decision."

I chose the orchid and when the clerk asked me which one, I told him the most expensive. And he gave me a white one with red spots.

"You'll never know how disappointed I was when I saw how little you applied yourself. And if I tried in every way I could to help you get ahead, my only reason was all the love I feel for you and my eagerness to see you make something of yourself."

In the room, you were on my right and I was on your left. Now and then you glanced at me for a second.

"I was desperate. I'm a woman without education. It would have been very different if my parents had brought me up the way I brought you up. I didn't know how serious your sickness was. If I had only known a little about medicine! But that's no reason for you to feel sorry for yourself: I've always done what I could. And if I couldn't do anything for you when you got sick it was only because with my miserable salary I couldn't do more and because I didn't know how serious your sickness was and because I thought it was one of your excuses not to study."

In Villa-Ramiro, there were poppies. In Madrid, there were no poppies. In Madrid, they told me the orchid was the best there was.

"You left me of your own accord. My heart was broken but I let you do what you

wanted, and even so, you're a minor and I could have forced you to come back. But as always, what matters to me is other people's happiness not my own. You'd be much better taken care of by your own mother than by strangers. Would I have denied you anything?"

In the room, you talked to me, staring at the cards almost the whole time.

The child was in the middle, on a pile of straw cut out of paper. The child was very poor so he had only a diaper to hide his things, but he was God so he had a tin crown.

The lake was made out of a candy-box lid. On the lake there was a cork duck whose head was too heavy and which tipped over when I wasn't looking. At the bottom of the lake there was a fish painted red.

The child was cold and since there was no heat the donkey and the cow behind him breathed on him and kept him warm. The donkey was on the right and the cow on the left.

A spangled star was hanging by a thread from the sky to show the three kings where the child was. To make it easier to find him, there

was a path of yellow sand through a field of green moss.

Since it was night, the dark blue paper sky was dotted with tiny silver paper stars. So everybody would understand what it was, I wrote around the side: "Here is the stable in Bethlehem where Jesus was born on December 24," on a slip of paper.

That evening, after saying the Rosary, Aunt Clara made us sing Christmas carols and I sat on your lap.

He didn't know about my cardboard theater or afterward about my wooden one.

I remember, a man was burying my feet in the sand on the beach at Melilla.

I don't know if he would have enjoyed watching my theater, like you, or if it would have bored him, like Elisa.

I remember a man's hands near my legs and the sand of the beach at Melilla.

He didn't know I learned how to serve mass and afterward ride a bicycle.

I remember, the sun was shining on the

man's hands, on my legs, and on the sand of the beach at Melilla.

I don't know if he would have liked seeing me serve mass, like you, or if he would have been angry seeing me ride a bicycle, like grandma.

A devil was burning the sacrilegious souls in a dungeon in hell.)

First that thing happened to me with Aunt Clara, then I went to church, then I stood in line for confession, then I left the church, then I went back, then I stood in line for confession, then my turn came, then I told him I had done it while I was asleep, then he gave me absolution, then I left the church, then I went back home,

then I left the house, then I went back to the church, then I stood in line for confession, then my turn came, then I told him it didn't happen while I was asleep, then he gave me absolution, then I left the church, then I went back home,

then I left the house, then I went back to the church, then I stood in line for confession, then my turn came, then I told him it didn't happen while I was asleep, then I told him I had committed a sacrilege, then I told him he should give me a heavier penance, then I left the church, then I went back home,

then I left the house, then I started toward the church, then I stopped, then I turned back, then I went home, then I went to bed, and finally I said Our Fathers until I fell asleep.

(A devil was burning the sacrilegious souls in a dungeon in hell.)

Grandma laughed when she told about it. Aunt Clara laughed when she told about it. Grandpa smoked while he listened to them. Elisa laughed when she heard what they said. I laughed too. I told you about it when you came back from the city.

The refrain was: "Hail Mary! Hail the Rosary!—Hail Saint Dominic who established it!"

Grandma said it had happened before daylight. Aunt Clara said it must have been four in the morning. Grandpa listened to them while he smoked. Elisa and I listened too. You couldn't listen: you were in the city.

After the refrain came the verse: "In your ear murmurs—terrible Satan—don't say your Rosary—sleep instead."

Grandma said they spent at least an hour singing under the schoolmaster's window. Aunt Clara said the dirty heretic hadn't flinched. Grandpa smoked his cigarette. Elisa listened to them and laughed; I did too. Later when you came back to Villa-Ramiro I told you everything.

The refrain was: "Hail Mary! Hail the Rosary!—Hail Saint Dominic who established it!"

When they took him away, grandma said it was what the anarchist deserved. When they took him away Aunt Clara said it was what the atheist deserved. When the *Guardia Civil* took away the schoolmaster grandpa was smoking a cigarette.

The man was burying my feet in the sand. It was on the beach at Melilla. I remember

his hands near my legs and the sand on the beach. The sun was shining that day, I remember.

You told me that I wouldn't kiss anyone at Melilla and that once I threw Elisa's pretty doll out the window. I don't remember anything about it. You often told me about those things.

On the envelope you keep in the wardrobe you wrote "Photographs of Melilla." You and I are in the photographs, Elisa too. A piece is missing from some of them. Someone has cut it off with a scissors.

I don't remember the things you often told me about Melilla. I remember my feet buried in the sand and the man's hands near my legs.

You were crying.

"My conscience is clear. I've always done my best as a mother and a wife. Today I'm a poor widow who has nothing except death to look forward to. My youth is over. I'm just an old lady. The world belongs to you young people."

You were crying and then you stopped talking.

"You were my baby, my treasure. How I loved you! How I love you still! How I love to look at the photographs where you're cuddled against me! You didn't care about anyone except me then. You didn't want to stay with anyone or kiss anyone, all you wanted was to stay with me. And I was proud to walk with you in Melilla."

You were crying.

"Papa's dead. Maybe it's better that way for all of us. He would have been a heavy burden. Besides he was punished for his sins: don't forget that even God punishes the guilty; in the Bible it says: *I shall punish Baal in Babylon.* But I want you to know I have nothing to blame myself for. I've lived only for you. I've always been too kind."

You were crying.

"Tell me you understand."

I said "yes" and you cried.

"Tell me that you think I was a good mother and a good wife."

I said "yes" and you cried.

"Ask my forgiveness."

I asked your forgiveness and you cried.

"Kiss me."
I kissed you and you cried.

Then, in the dark, we walked down the hall to the door. In the dark I kissed you again on the landing. And in the dark you kissed me and you hugged me in your arms.

They all told me that everything is different now, that sicknesses are cured now, that traveling is fast now, that humanity has made progress now, and that comfort contributes to happiness. You told me that too. When I asked them a question they answered me. Then I didn't ask any more questions.

They told me you had to love your country, you had to sacrifice yourself for it, you had to be proud of its heroes, you had to respect its laws, you had to denounce its traitors, you had to hate its enemies. You told me that too. When I asked them a question they answered me. Then I didn't ask any more questions.

They told me that the family was sacred, that you had to respect your parents, that you had to thank them for bringing you up, that you

had to obey them, that you had to love them whatever they do. You told me that too. When I asked them a question they answered me. Then I didn't ask any more questions.

They told me you had to thank God for giving us life, for not taking it away from us, for giving us hope of salvation. You told me that too. When I asked them a question they answered me. Then I didn't ask any more questions.

Then they told me that I had to do it, then I didn't ask any more questions and I did it. Then they told me that I had to go there, then I didn't ask any more questions and I went there.

I asked you: "Why are the Jews bad?"

You told me: "Because; everyone knows that."

Then I asked you: "Why are the anarchists bad?"

You told me: "Because; everyone knows that."

I asked you: "Why was papa a Jew?"

And you didn't answer me.

Then I asked you: "Why was papa an anarchist?"

And you didn't answer me.

Yes.

I asked you: "Are the Jews the ones who killed Jesus Christ?"

You told me: "Of course!"

Then I asked you: "Are the anarchists the ones who set off bombs to kill people?"

You told me: "Of course!"

I asked you if I would be a Jew when I grew up.

You told me: "Of course not!"

Then I asked you if I would be an anarchist when I grew up.

You told me: "Of course not!"

Then, mama, you said I was a good boy and you kissed me.

Yes.

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BAAL BABYLON
A NOVEL BY ARRABAL

Translated from the French by Richard Howard

In this first novel by a young Spaniard, we have one of the most haunting and terrifying evocations of childhood since Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.*

Written according to a new principle of composition which might be likened to the pointillist technique in painting, the novel is composed of a series of short passages — litanies — each of which transcribes or evokes a highly charged emotional experience or sensory impression. From these juxtaposed litanies there emerges the devastating picture of a young boy raised in an environment of bigotry and hate: he only dimly remembers his father, a Jewish anarchist who was arrested and convicted on the basis of his wife's testimony; his mother, an ignorant self-righteous woman, tries endlessly to justify her perfidy and erase all memory of her husband from her own and her son's mind; his sex-ridden, masochistic Aunt Clara, who forces the boy to beat her with a belt, subsequently seduces him, and teaches him to confuse sexual sensations with sin, guilt, and torture. Torn between the obsessive memory of his dead father and the warped, predominantly female environment in which he is raised, the child symbolizes the conflict of contemporary, middle-class Spain, where vestiges of the medieval still linger in everyday life.

Fernando Arrabal, who is twenty-seven, presently lives in Paris and writes in French. He is the author of several plays, of which *The Automobile Graveyard* has recently been published by Grove Press (an Evergreen Book).

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